

ABOUT VISUAL ARTISTS

Shari Montana, “Narratives”

Through September at the Artists’ Shop in Missoula, with a reception 5-8 p.m. Sept 5; and Sept. 4-8 at the Brunswick Building Gallery in Missoula as part of the Pattee Canyon Ladies’ Salon’s “Studies From the Figure”

Artist’s website: www.sharimontana.com

Missoula artist and horsewoman Shari Montana shares mixed media and encaustic paintings that reference prehistoric work, while exploring historic and contemporary human experience.

Montana grew up in Spokane, and has been drawing and painting since her teenage years, when she had her first solo exhibit as a senior in high school. She studied art in Los Angeles before moving to Missoula in 1990 with her husband, a Montana native.

“I love it here, and one of the most refreshing things is the community of artists and how they support each other,” she says. She’s been a member of the Pattee Canyon Ladies Salon – a group that meets twice a month to draw from the figure – since 1993.

The artist is also an avid equestrian, who owns four horses and runs the River Pines Horse Sanctuary on the family’s 32-acre farm, which supports up to 20 horses at a time.

“My passion for horses guides my work from two perspectives,” she says. “One, it keeps me drawing and painting from life, thereby continuing to build my skills and develop my craft ... and two, it has spurred me to explore expressionism over the years, allowing myself to move away from the comfort of realistic reporting.”

Prehistoric art also informs her work, and has been an influence since she began working toward her BFA at The University of Montana more than a decade ago. The professor invited students to ask themselves, “Who am I now and what is my place in history, as an artist and as a human being?”

“There’s never a day in my studio when I don’t think of this assignment and its powerful question,” says Montana. Her studies of prehistoric art have led her to the conclusion that we have much in common with early humans, who also used mark-making to “report what we see accurately, as well as divine the mystery of what we’re seeing.”



“Learning to Hunt” by Shari Montana

Bently Spang, “On Fire”

Oct. 2-Nov. 6 at MSU Northcutt Steele Gallery in Billings, with a reception 5-7 p.m. Oct. 16

Bently Spang, a multidisciplinary artist and teacher who has a studio in Billings, tells the story of fire from the perspective of trees in his new series, “On Fire.” The works were evoked by the 2012 Ash Creek wildfire, which devastated Spang’s family ranch on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Spang visualizes the voices of charred trees through a series of video-documented, “rubbings” on paper. The resulting installation juxtaposes performance video alongside the “rubbings,” creating a dialogue with the natural world. Given the environmental challenges posed by climate change, the artist posits that such a conversation is more important than ever.

Spang is also artist-in-residence at the Yellowstone Art Museum’s Visible Vault through October. According to an article that appeared Aug. 2 in the *Billings Gazette*, the artist recently used fistfuls of colored pencils to draw circles and loops, while documenting the process with a fisheye video camera strapped to his chest. The creations are inspired by traditional Cheyenne bead artists, who sometimes make “crazed beadwork” – freeform creations using only the beads left in the bottom of their pouches.

Spang earned a bachelor’s degree from Montana State University Billings and a master’s in fine arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has shown his work around the world. His multi-media piece, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” is on display at the YAM as part of the “Boundless Vision” exhibit, and is part of the museum’s permanent collection.

Reno Charette, director of American Indian Outreach at MSU Billings, told the *Gazette*: “He’s a totally-out-of-the-box thinker and believer in a community’s potential to see the profound expressions of everyday life interactions.”



“Photo Study No. 1” by Bently Spang

Featured Artist: Emily Free Wilson (with Bobby Free)

Sept. 5-26 at the Clay Studio of Missoula, with a reception 5:30-9 p.m. Sept. 5

Artist’s website: www.freeceramics.com

“I need to make fun, happy, colorful things out of clay,” says Helena artist Emily Free Wilson, who joins her brother, ceramic artist Bobby Free, in an exhibit of jars at the Clay Studio. Wilson is the gallery director at the Archie Bray Foundation and co-owner of Free Ceramics, a family-run pottery in Helena.

A graduate from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a degree in sculpture and ceramics, Wilson moved to Helena in 2003 for an internship with the Archie Bray Foundation. Her obsession with drawing dots and combining them with pots came about during an “ah-hah!” moment in a friend’s studio. She began to fine-tune a line of “dot pots,” and eventually established Free Ceramics, with her husband, Matt Wilson, and brother, Bobby Free.

The artist and her collaborators create simple, inviting pots out of mid-range porcelain, either on a wheel or pinched out of large coils by hand. Wilson then decorates each piece with quick black lines and



Covered jar by Emily Free Wilson

colorful dots. Free Ceramics was featured on the front page of *Ceramics Monthly* in 2011, and the distinctive dot-adorned pots are sold at galleries across the United States.

“Having my hands in both an artistic business and my own studio allows me to push my designs, ideas and challenge myself to keep evolving as an artist,” says Wilson. “My imagination can turn images of rain, fireworks or candy into fun abstract designs that dance across the forms.”

Jay Schmidt: “Warning Shots”

Sept. 15-Dec. 31 at the Holter Museum of Art in Helena

Artist’s website: www.jayschmidtartist.com

Prolific Bozeman painter and sculptor Jay Schmidt uses contemporary imagery to confront global culture. “Warning Shots,” which opened last year at the Missoula Art Museum, is lauded as “the perfect play between the 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional work. Whereas the sculpture is brutish and tends to emphasize an ‘anti-craft’ aesthetic, Schmidt’s painting style is refined, mature, and bold. The works in the exhibition play off each other as a fully resolved whole.”

Schmidt earned a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1974 and completed his MFA at the University of California, Davis, two years later.

In 2007 he retired after 24 years as a professor in the School of Art at Montana State University. Since then, he’s participated in a dozen collaborative exhibitions, as well as two solo shows prior to his exhibitions at MAM and the Holter.

His outsized sculptures, often executed with a chainsaw, can be menacing, brutish: a buck-toothed rat with a red clown nose, a bird-headed man with a totem on his back, a skeleton with jointed, gantling arms and hands, with a Day-Glo M-16 rifle at his side.

He fills his canvases from edge to edge and corner to corner, layering the images with contemporary symbolism. The large-scale, multiple-panel paintings “are at once a visual orgy of challenging imagery and beautifully constructed compositions of color and form,” notes MAM.

– Excerpted from the Missoula Art Museum’s website, www.missoulaartmuseum.org



“Ratfink Nation” by Jay Schmidt

Jeanette Rehahn, “Wild Grasses and Flowing Waters” (with Janet Sullivan)

Sept. 25-Nov.8 at the Hockaday Museum of Art in Kalispell, with a reception 5-7 p.m. Sept. 25

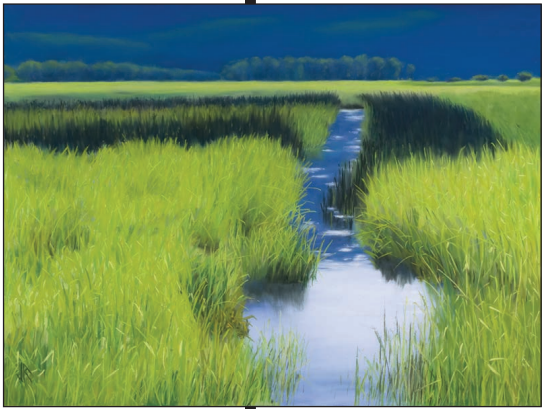
Artist’s website: jeanetterehahn.com

Pastel painter Jeanette Rehahn of Bigfork joins Missoula artist Janet Sullivan in an exhibit that celebrates the natural beauty of Montana.

The artist began drawing at age 4, and attended the Art Institute of Chicago. She melded her interest in art, science and nature by working on a science film and producing scientific illustrations for Purdue University. After moving to San Francisco, she worked as an illustrator at the Exploratorium, a renowned national science museum, illustrated a book on Kirlian photography, freelanced a variety of projects, and began to create and embellish gourds.

Rehahn finally found her way to the Flathead Valley, where she’s spent the past 10 years, “expanding into the world of color, endless skies, huge mountains and the shining waters.

Rehahn paints throughout northwestern Montana, and says her “special places” include Swan Lake, the Upper Swan River, the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Holland Lake. For this exhibition, Rehahn focuses her intrigue of wild grasses and how they respond to the wind, weather and the seasons.



“High Summer Green” by Jeanette Rehahn



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Send your submissions for About Visual Arts

With About Visual Arts, *State of the Arts* continues to profile living Montana artists (no students, please), whose work is the focus of a current exhibit (on display during some portion of the two months covered by the current issue of *State of the Arts*).

Submissions must include:

- A digital image of the artist’s work, with title of the piece (at least 200 dpi);
- A brief bio and description of the artist’s work;
- Dates and title of exhibit; and
- The gallery or museum name, town and phone number.

MAC will select submissions that reflect a cross-section of gender, geography, styles and ethnicity, and are from a mix of public and private galleries and museums.

Deadline for submissions for the November/December issue is Wednesday, Oct. 1. Send submissions to writeus@livelytimes.com with About Visual Arts in the subject line.

About Visual Artists
compiled by Kristi
Niemeyer